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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001223

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: LOW-KEY REACTION IN TAL AFAR TO BASRA
CONFLICT; FOCUS IS ON LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Classified By: NINEWA PRT LEADER JASON HYLAND: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message
from the Western Ninewa Branch Office.

Summary

¶1. (C) Key officials in Tal Afar, the second-largest city in Ninewa province with a large Shia Turkoman population, told PRT Leader and Western Ninewa Branch Office Chief March 30 that they supported Iraqi efforts to contain the violence in Basra generated by Shia militia. Tal Afar appeared focused on preserving its own hard-won security gains and looking ahead to economic development. Now that key stakeholders in this city have a workable security structure in place, delivering on execution of the \$37 million Tal Afar Reconstruction Fund, reconnecting the city with the provincial government, and helping the community address its economic needs are critical to keeping the gains made. In particular, we welcome the renewed Mission effort, in partnership with the GOI, to fulfill Iraq's obligations on the Tal Afar Reconstruction Fund. End summary.

Mayor Agrees with Basra Crack-Down

¶2. (SBU) Ninewa PRT Leader and Western Branch Office Chief together met March 30 with Tal Afar Mayor Najim Abdullah Al-Jibouri, who asserted that most citizens in western Ninewa understood that the fighting in Basra had nothing to do with the rest of Iraq. It was simply an internal struggle within the Shia community there over who would control the smuggling of oil. Because the combatants were essentially criminals, he agreed with the crack-down by the Government of Iraq (GOI). Najim said that there were some who had differing views, attributing the conflict in part to tensions building over the upcoming elections.

Little Impact in Tal Afar

¶3. (C) Najim emphasized that there has been little or no impact on Tal Afar, Ninewa's second-largest city, which is divided between Shia and Sunni Turkoman communities. He said ordinary citizens had long ago forgotten about such issues elsewhere in Iraq because of more immediate concerns, including harsh living conditions and unemployment. Najim said that everyone -- citizens and authorities alike -- wanted to preserve the high level of security now enjoyed in the city after so much effort. (Note: A drive through Tal Afar March 30 and the following week showed a calm city with many shops open, and with a strong security presence evident. End Note)

Community Approach Working in Tal Afar

¶4. (C) During a subsequent meeting Mayor Najim, Iraqi Army 10th Brigade Commander Brigadier Quais, and Tal Afar's Shia and Sunni senior sheikhs also said they had noticed little or no impact here from the violence in Basra. Brigadier Quais highlighted the team approach that the local government officials and civic leaders take to managing problems and ensuring security. The senior Shia sheikh said that Tal Afar's Sunni-Shia community was finally healing now that the violence here had subsided, and that a return to brotherhood and friendship within the community was possible. "Good people live here," and they must say no to terrorism, he said. Brigadier Quais credited these community leaders, the Sunni and Shia Sheikhs, with establishing a positive context for the rule of law in western Ninewa province. The need now, he said, was for jobs and reconstruction in order to put a final end to the insurgency.

Comment

¶5. (C) Tal Afar's leaders clearly do not want to give up hard-won security gains, and just as clearly they have set their sights on moving on with economic development. USAID implementing partner IRD (strictly protect) is doing excellent work in Tal Afar to offer temporary employment and activities for young people, through soccer programs, vocational training, clean-up campaigns, and playground construction. These programs have been very well-received by the Mayor and the community as a whole. The PRT also supports and advises a successful micro-finance center in Tal Afar, and is pursuing other programs. However, here -- as elsewhere in Ninewa -- long-term economic needs are looming. Now that

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key stakeholders in this city have a workable security structure in place, delivering on long-overdue Tal Afar Reconstruction Funds, reconnecting the city with the provincial government, and helping the community address its economic needs are critical to keeping the gains made.
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